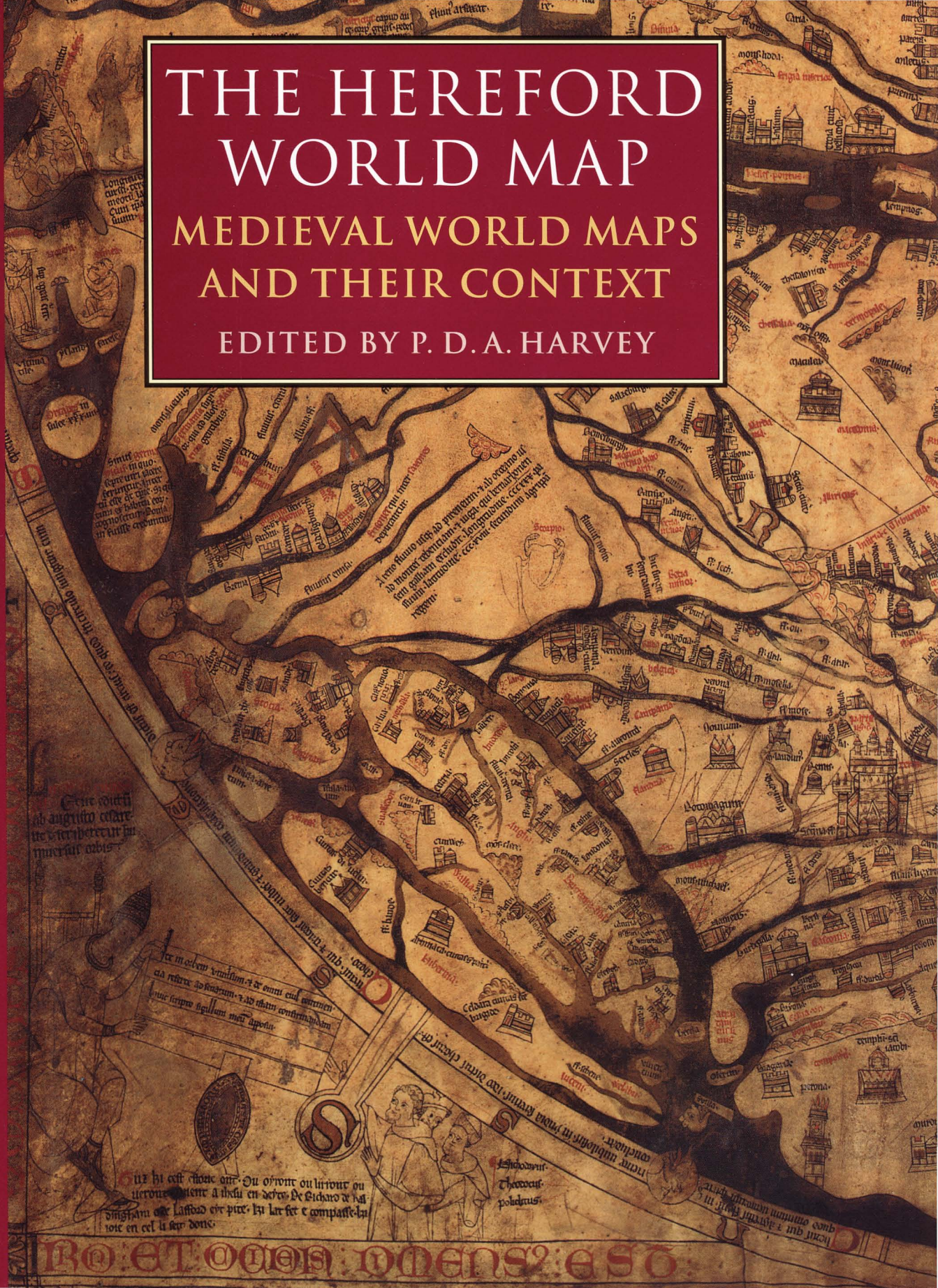


HARVEY

THE HEREFORD WORLD MAP
MEDIEVAL WORLD MAPS AND THEIR CONTEXT

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2006

SAYONARA DIORAMA

ACTING OUT THE WORLD AS A STAGE IN MEDIÉVAL CARTOGRAPHY AND CYBERSPACE

Adrienne Wortzel

Sayonara Diorama was a multiple-site, electronic-media performance production, written and produced by the author, featuring a repertory company of robots and human actors. It also included remote participating performers via the Internet from Finland, Great Britain, Germany, and several locations in the United States, creating a performance that all but spanned the globe.¹

SETTING THE SCENE

The seminal story of *Sayonara Diorama* was a fictive story of the *Beagle* sequel. Thirty years after the first voyage of the *Beagle*, Charles Darwin and Captain Fitzroy set out to sea again on another exploratory voyage. While at sea, they share their intense and opposed positions on organized religion. The resonance of their theological simmer rolls over into a quarrel which triggers a tremendous storm. Simultaneously, on a yet uncharted island in the same open sea, Fate is forcing its way through a fissure in the earth's core up to the underbelly of a volcano. Appalled at the lateness of the hour for a visit, the volcano blows its stack. Expelled from the volcano's throat, Fate rises up from the earth and couches itself like a recalcitrant Buddha on the crest of spewing lava. The crest in turn collides with the fierce gusts of the altercation between Darwin and Fitzroy. Sailors struggle to steer clear of the resulting vortex; but in the end Fate has the upper hand. The *Beagle* is shipwrecked and all hands disappear.

Captain Fitzroy is dispatched to a well-known island on the charts called Heaven. Darwin is washed ashore on an uncharted island. Indigenous to the island are three manifestations of the monstrous races: Mr Blemye, the man with his face in his chest, Mr Panotti, a man with enormous ears which he wraps around himself for shelter, and Mr Sciapod, whose body ends in one long leg and foot which he can extend over his head as protection from the elements.² Also present is Pandora, Leonardo da Vinci as a curious tourist, and the voice of the Questress (the narrator). Marooned, Darwin begins to study the island's life forms in terms of their evolutionary adaptations. The island's cast of characters in turn begins to study him in the same light. What ensues is a discussion on who has the best evolutionary adaptations.

My main concern in all of this was to give the monstrous races a voice. From the script:

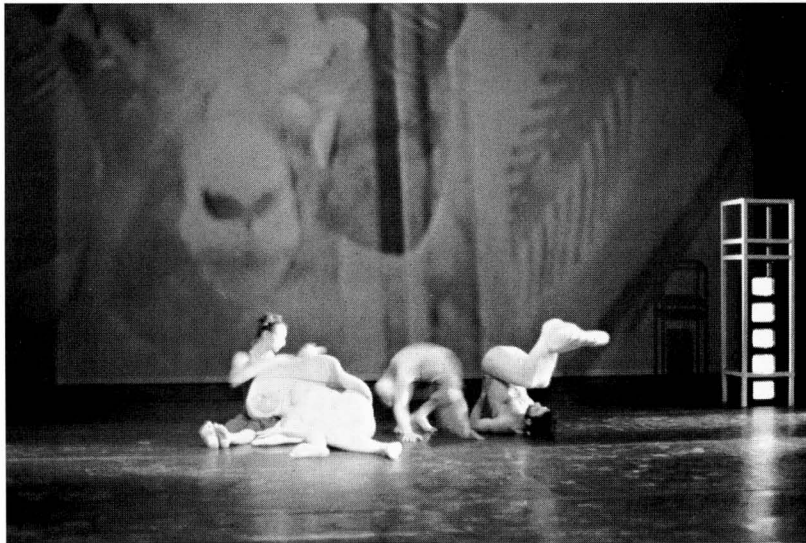


Fig. 1. Masters Sciapod, Blemye, Panotti, and Pandora in *Sayonara Diorama*.

MASTER CLAN-IS-RAW-HERD³ Those who make maps must divide the world into empirical geographical zones in order to cope with their position in it. What is unknown must be identified at least as idiosyncratic. Not knowing is not acceptable.

MASTER BLEMYE Tis completely foolish, for if there are more men like our perpetual recorder here, whose eyes are not central in their chests close to their hearts as God intended, then why not designate THEM as mythological and monstrous and put THEM at the edge. For to me (*he leers at Master Clan-Is-Raw-Herd*) they are strange beyond endurance.

MASTER SCIAPOD All I know is that I am the only one of you who is rendered safe and dry in rain and snow by my own physiology. If evolution is indeed everything our bearded friend here says it is then certainly my ancestors – who have engineered the most ingenious and useful adaptation of all who deserve placement as the centerpiece of the world. If inside the edge and outside the edge do not mean completely different things hierarchically, then why not give the inside up to the ones you have designated outsiders?⁴

ARE YOU SURE IT'S REALLY ROUND?

Drawing the curtain on the thirteenth century, we see the world staged as a mixture of geographical, legendary, factual, and ideological narrative in its mappaemundi. In the Hereford map continents and countries are arranged in relationship to one another, but not to a point of accuracy that could facilitate the navigation of vehicles or vessels through the real world. The centre of this world is occupied by the theological centre of the universe, Jerusalem. As one proceeds farther out to the edge of the world to the unknown edges, nature migrates to the outskirts of human nature's possibilities towards the realm of 'otherness': the unformed and deformed inhabitants at the edge of the known world. These human creatures are not products of anomalous singular birthings, but evolved races of men with anomalous features.

Medieval maps told stories both graphically and textually and portrayed them in a state of being acted out at their highest moment of drama. Portrayed simultaneously as layered history on one two-dimensional plane on the Hereford map are biblical and

Sayonara Diorama



Fig. 2. Mr Panotti in *Sayonara Diorama*.

classical traumatic events, as well as medieval iconic images which speak as events through their accompanying text. There are, for example, the dramatic expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, the route of the Exodus indicated by a drawn line, including the very graphical parting of the Red Sea, and Noah's Ark, which seems like it is straining the limits of legal occupancy. Then there is St Augustine in residence at his see in north Africa, the medieval huntsman with hounds indicating 'passe avant'.⁵ There are over five hundred drawings representing towns, cities, and their architecture. There are 'fifteen biblical events, 33 plants and animals, 32 peoples of the earth, and five scenes from classical mythology'.⁶ There is the medieval icon of Christ represented by the pelican piercing her breast in order to feed her young with her blood. Real and mythical creatures are not differentiated, but rather illustrated with democratic disregard for their efficacy and extreme regard to the power of their iconography.

Nor are these map tales aimed solely at a clerical audience. For the most part 'texts outside the circle [i.e. of the world] are in French, the language of the contemporary English aristocracy, suggesting that a secular audience was envisaged. (All other texts on the map are in Latin, the universal scholarly and clerical language of the time.)'⁷ Travelling with our mind's eyes over the Hereford map, it would seem that, long before Shakespeare, all the world was a stage, an arena of action.

DIORAMA — OR DRAMA — IN CYBERSPACE

The question of whether the medieval cartographer was shaping an external world space, or an interior mind space — or both — as a paradigm of ideological navigation can also be applied to new media where myth and imagination play a large part in delineating and shaping space. Developing internet technologies afford a new area of territorial mapping in the space of telecommunications. In mapping that world I believe that we should look to maps such as the Hereford map for the kind of freedom of movement between didactic, spiritual, philosophical, and artistic concerns. The

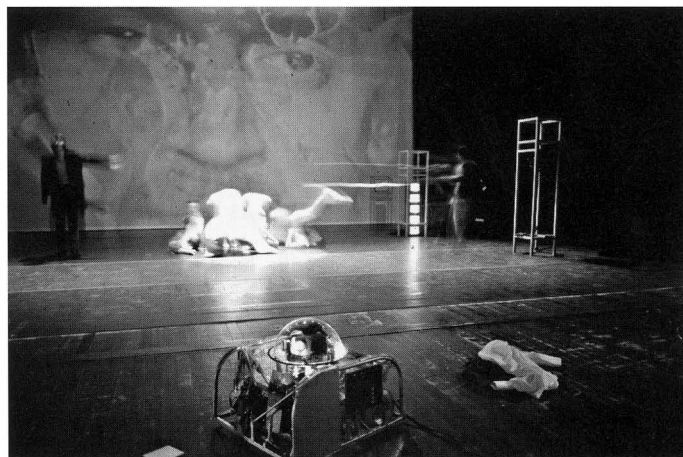


Fig. 3. Darwin, Masters Blemye, Sciapod, Pannotti, Pandora, and the ship's detective robot in *Sayonara Diorama*.

territories of cyberspace, with their capacity for collaboration, information transfer, communication, enterprise, journalism, education, and art, are forms of virtual reality and, to some degree, virtual real estate. In internet space we can discern trade routes, political factions, creative arts, religious groups, educators, and the equivalent of minstrels, performers, and town criers in an indiscriminate, anarchical, and chameleon-like space.

We log into this space with our minds: our physical bodies remain behind. The disembodied presence we have in cyberspace allows for our appearances as actors, that is the taking on of assumed characters and identities. Disembodiment is what makes it possible for everyone to safely be imperfect and monstrous – safe, in certain respects, to be anything one wants to be – virtually. In cyberspace there is an equal flux to hell and to heaven because it functions as a performance space that sets its stage solely in our minds.

In medieval literature, climactic moments were rendered allegorically as fictive encounters with stylized personages. This convention appears in the works of Christine de Pisan, who wrote first-person verse and prose documenting fictive visitations from the likes of Dame Reason, Dame Fortune, and Dame Rectitude, all of whom had the good sense to appear in or around Christine's domicile, sparing that author, unlike ours, from the trouble of rushing about in an awkward or arbitrary search for characters.⁸

It is common practice in virtual on-line communities for participants to adopt extremely idiosyncratic, phantasmagorical characteristics. Although the monstrous races may, in some cases, have analogous characteristics resembling real human beings in what were then barely charted territories (for instance, of pygmies), in cyberspace the self-representations, or avatars, created by participants emerge out of associations that leap to the level of pure invention. To illustrate my point, here are actual descriptions self-set by individual characters inhabiting a virtual community or, in the vernacular, a MOO (Object Oriented Multi-User Dungeon) – a textual environment on the Internet that is programmed by the inhabitants:

Sayonara Diorama

GREENIE. A succulent green mold covers his body ... bearded not only of face but of feet ... his appearance might lead one to imagine a desperate heart but he hails you with a silent voice that evaporates your resistance.

JACK. A four-armed youth adorned in a slightly-too-large blue terrycloth robe. It sings in a warbling, monotonous drone.

CALCIUM ENRICHED TOADSTOOL. Blanketed in a soft and desiccated fungus, this creature has much heart. It appears to have been mainlining milk, but it is not any stronger than it was in its infancy. Secrete charm.

The internet's possibilities for global communication, self-publishing, real-time reporting, an always-up-to-date encyclopaedic body of knowledge, and, most of all, for the hypertextual telling of stories that have no beginning, middle, or end, incites an immersion and promotes the idea of mapping cyberspace via hypertextual narrative.

Salman Rushdie described the pluralistic nature of the internet and its power of depiction very well, even though this was not his intention:

He looked into the water and saw that it was made up of a thousand thousand thousand and one different currents, each one a different colour, weaving in and out of one another like a liquid tapestry of breathtaking complexity; and Iff explained that these were the Streams of Story, that each coloured strand represented and contained a single tale. Different parts of the Ocean contained different sorts of stories, and as all the stories that had ever been told and many that were still in the process of being invented could be found here, the Ocean of the Streams of Story was in fact the biggest library in the universe. And because the stories were held here in fluid form, they retained the ability to change, to become new versions of themselves, to join up with other stories and so become yet other stories; so that unlike a library of books, the Ocean of the Streams of Story was much more than a storeroom of yarns. It was not dead, but alive.⁹

One could say about the Hereford map that it is a fourth-dimensional narrative – relating stories (whether these stories are scriptings, coding, fables, or factual data) layered over time. Looking at it now, it redeems the quality of imagination from its long sleep of disrepute, when it was associated only with madness or lack of discipline. It is not dead, but alive. The importance of memory, of memorizing strategies such as the memory palaces of medieval times is also resurrected in cyberspace which affords a space for literally delineating and acting out topographies of memory palaces.

As soon as the nature of the internet became clear, attempts were made to impose a structure on it that would emphasize its homogeneity over its power of diversity. 'Scripts' and 'maps' and 'agents' tried to impose a structure that would tend to tame the beast, before we could see how wild it can really become. I would like to think that this out-there space, cyberspace, and its global communication aspects, is also an in-here, mindful space that forges an invitation to explore and re-map the world ideologically again, akin to the way of our medieval western European mapmakers. Every point on earth is designated at a fixed longitude and latitude. And now instruments of our own making can render us pinpointable as individuals anywhere in the world, but only by Cartesian co-ordinates, and only at any given moment. Our world is now recreating itself via new technologies. At a time when sensor and satellite technology have the potential to report the location of any particular creature in the world at any time, in what form will there be a simultaneous scramble for bearings in a rapidly changing technology?

Since we live in a world where our exact location can be transparent and where we are suddenly anyone's business, we may evolve into creatures that are always imaging how others may be viewing us, a constantly mirrored creature – or on the other hand we may find that the only way to sustain solitude or anonymity is to move faster than instruments of our own making can detect us, thus returning us to a nomadic society not so far from the idea of medieval processional theatre. This kind of vulnerability to visibility could render us a very self-conscious species. We can be discovered in any captured moment, our lives are a series of dioramic moments subject to surveillance.

Definitive empirical knowledge of one's clinical bearings is no guarantee against a loss of one's relationship to qualities, or of one's relationship to one's stories, scripts, or mappings. One could have bearings but still miss the ability to discern the difference of being in one place rather than another. As an attender of several conferences sprinkled throughout the world, I was housed in a Marriott Hotel on each occasion, and circulated with the same people, all colleagues in the digital-art realm. At times it was hard to tell what city we were in or whether it mattered. Once space is deconstructed to elements of synapses and nodes, all its elements may end up being considered equal and the same, unless our mapping system allows for the recognition of diversity and accommodates mapping more like a process, something that is moving rapidly in what we call real time.

Step by step we have mapped our world empirically by instrument and by the movement of our physical selves across it. Empirical evidence is empirical evidence. Interpretations can vary. On a visit to New York's Museum of Natural History, I encountered a five-year-old child in a state of terror and tears in the Sea Worlds exhibition room, in front of a diorama of pearl divers in the Caribbean. When he calmed down enough to speak, he said: 'The museum got all the other animals to pose by killing them and stuffing them and I know it had to have pearl divers for this exhibit, but I wonder sometimes if the pearl divers' families miss them even though they can see them in this exhibit.' The child had drawn the completely logical conclusion that the human commodity had been acquired just as the animal commodity had. If we mapped that reaction for the future, we may be reluctant to think of how certain events of our time might be interpreted.

So can we write down the new world, creating a diagrammatic scripting, coding, mapping, which accounts for our curiosity and ability to wonder and invent, makes use of our passion for study, interpretation, and display of history, and re-explores and re-maps the world ideologically again, retaining all its diversity, while deepening our appreciation of its chameleon-like qualities over time? And are not the medieval mappaemundi as well as the space of virtual networks true inspiration in that way – both paradigms for mapping a new new world? I think mappaemundi in particular are a marvellous guide for the exercise of imagination and discourse, particularly by artists. They supply us with infinite possibilities for pluralistic narratives, and for presenting ourselves as disembodied in an environment with no borders except for the arbitrary ones we impose on it. Roger Bacon's thirteenth-century argument that religious art make use of three-dimensional illusion to delude the viewer into thinking they were participating in the pictured theological event – and thus turning from viewer into believer – constitutes a whole new expression in the science of artificial intelligence, that is, the emergence of the holy holodeck.

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At the end of *Sayonara Diorama*, the Questress (the voice of the author as narrator) says:

QUESTRESS In any system, including the solar system, an inside and an outside to the system is assumed, akin to a beginning and an end in a linear system. The focus on nodes and synapses still clouds the issue of borders and territories; where something ends and where it should begin; the substance of the center and the edge. Surely, everything can happen simultaneously, and synaesthesia can reign.

NOTES

- 1 *Sayonara Diorama* was performed 28 February and 4 April 1998 at the Lovinger Theater, Bronx, New York, sponsored by the Lehman College Art Gallery and funded by the Electronic Media and Film Program of the New York State Council on the Arts. My work as an artist explores the possibilities of new electronic media in relation to traditional art forms such as opera and the novel, and use of the internet as a performance medium.
- 2 A main source of research for the manifestations of the monstrous races in *Sayonara Diorama* was John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).
- 3 Clan-Is-Raw-Herd is an anagram for Charles Darwin.
- 4 The first version of the *Sayonara Diorama* script was published as an article in *Intelligent Agent: A Journal of Arts, Technology and Education*, 2.1 (Fall 1997), 80-87.
- 5 Westrem, *Hereford Map*, plates for sections 2, 6, 7, 9.
- 6 Edson, *Time and Space*, 142.
- 7 Joan Williams, *Mappa Mundi and the Chained Library: Treasures of Hereford Cathedral* (Hereford: Hereford Cathedral and Jarrold, 1999), p. 5.
- 8 Christine de Pisan, *La città delle dame*, ed. by Patrizia Caraffi and Earl Jeffrey Richards (Milan: Luni, 1997); Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. by Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea, 1982).
- 9 Salmon Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (London: Granta, 1990), p. 71.